

109TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. CON. RES. 18

Expressing the grave concern of Congress regarding the continuing gross violations of human rights and civil liberties of the Syrian and Lebanese people by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JANUARY 6, 2005

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN (for herself and Mr. ENGEL) submitted the following concurrent resolution; which was referred to the Committee on International Relations

CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

Expressing the grave concern of Congress regarding the continuing gross violations of human rights and civil liberties of the Syrian and Lebanese people by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Whereas the Syrian Arab Republic is governed by an authoritarian regime which continues to commit serious human rights abuses, including the use of torture and arbitrary arrest and detention;

Whereas the Department of State's Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2003 states that Syria "significantly restricts freedom of speech and of the press", that "freedom of assembly does not exist under the law", and that "the Government restricted freedom of association";

Whereas Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”;

Whereas Article 20 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states “Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.”;

Whereas Syria’s September 2001 press law permits the government to arbitrarily deny or revoke publishing licenses for vague reasons and compels media to submit all material to government censors;

Whereas Syrian authorities have arrested, or, in the case of foreigners, expelled journalists for writing critically about Syria’s policies;

Whereas Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have reported that the security forces of Syria are targeting emerging Syrian human rights organizations, as well as their attorneys, in an apparent attempt to intimidate those organizations;

Whereas on March 8, 2004, Syrian security forces arrested more than 30 human rights dissidents and civilians at a sit-in in front of the parliament;

Whereas a United States diplomat who was watching the peaceful demonstrations was also arrested and held for an hour in what the United States called an unacceptable violation of diplomatic practice and which the United States protested “in the strongest terms”;

Whereas Article 7 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states “All are equal before the law and are enti-

tled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law.”;

Whereas the criminal law of Syria provides for reduced sentences in cases of “honor” killings, and spousal rape is not illegal;

Whereas the infringement by Syria on human rights and civil liberties extends into the Lebanese Republic, which it continues to occupy in violation of United Nations Security Council resolutions;

Whereas Human Rights Watch, in its 2003 World Report, stated that “political activists in Lebanon continued to demand the withdrawal of all Syrian forces from the country and organized demonstrations throughout the year, many of which the internal security forces dispersed forcibly”;

Whereas hundreds of Lebanese civilians are believed to have been killed or “disappeared” by Syrian occupation forces or its secret police;

Whereas hundreds of Kurdish civilians were injured or killed in clashes with the Syrian authorities that began on March 12, 2004, in Qamishli, a city in northeastern Syria and, according to Syrian Kurdish sources, security forces used live ammunition against unarmed civilians;

Whereas Syrian authorities are attempting to imprison Aktham Naisse, Syria’s leading human rights activist, who has been charged with spreading false information, forming an underground association with links to international human rights groups, and opposing the ruling Baath party;

Whereas in November 2004, upon his release from prison, Kamal Labwani, a 48-year-old physician in Syria, stated

that there are at least 400 political prisoners in Syria, 100 of whom have been jailed for at least 20 years;

Whereas Mr. Labwani urged “all defenders of freedom and human rights, whether individuals, associations, bodies or international, Arab, or local organizations to participate with us in this campaign to call for the immediate release of all political prisoners and detainees of opinion and conscience”;

Whereas in November 2004, Syrian journalist Louai Hussein was banned from writing by the Syrian Interior Ministry’s political security office;

Whereas the arrest in Germany in November 2004 of a Syrian embassy official for espionage and issuing threats against the Syrian opposition in Europe is being cited as an example of a campaign reportedly launched by Syrian dictator Bashar Assad, aimed at intimidating the regime’s opposition abroad; and

Whereas human rights and democracy groups in Syria have sponsored a petition urging greater freedoms and the release of all political prisoners, which has garnered more than 6,000 signatures: Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate*
2 *concurring), That Congress—*

3 (1) condemns the consistent pattern of gross
4 violations of internationally recognized human rights
5 by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic;

6 (2) calls on the international community to
7 adopt a resolution at the upcoming session of the
8 United Nations Commission on Human Rights

1 which details the dismal human rights record of
2 Syria;

3 (3) expresses its support for the people of Syria
4 in their daily struggle for freedom, respect for
5 human rights and civil liberties, democratic self-gov-
6 ernance, and the establishment of the rule of law;

7 (4) encourages the President and the Secretary
8 of State to reach out to dissidents, human rights ac-
9 tivists, and the nonviolent democratic opposition in
10 Syria, and to assist them in their efforts; and

11 (5) urges the adoption and pursuit of these and
12 other policies to seek a democratic government in
13 Syria that will—

14 (A) bring freedom and democracy to the
15 people of Syria;

16 (B) cease the illegal occupation by Syria of
17 the Lebanese Republic;

18 (C) abandon support for terrorism by
19 Syria;

20 (D) not pursue research, development, ac-
21 quisition, production, transfer, or deployment of
22 biological, chemical, or nuclear weapons, will
23 provide credible assurances that such behavior
24 will not be undertaken in the future, and will
25 agree to allow United Nations and other inter-

1 national observers to verify such assurances;
2 and
3 (E) live in peace and security with the
4 international community.

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